

NEWS

*"Improving and Protecting the
Health, Well-Being and Self-
Reliance of All Montanans."*



Department of Public Health and Human Services

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DPHHS: Be proactive about measles vaccinations

Department of Public Health and Human Services (DPHHS) officials said that given recent measles outbreaks across the country, Montanans should take steps now to check their immunization history to ensure they are protected against the disease.

Recent measles outbreaks in California and 17 other states, including several close to Montana, are also cause for concern here, according to state health officials.

Fortunately, Montana has been measles-free since 1990 and currently does not have a case. That's why DPHHS officials say now is an excellent time for state residents to take time to ensure their vaccinations against measles and other diseases are current. And, if not, then take steps to get them up-to-date to protect our communities, family and friends.

"If you're unsure whether or not you've had the measles vaccine, now is the time to find out," said DPHHS Director Richard Oppen. "We are encouraging those who are not vaccinated against the measles, to do so as soon as possible. The measles vaccine is safe and highly effective."

According to Bekki Wehner of the DPHHS Immunization Program, two doses of the vaccine are about 97% effective in preventing measles. "Anyone who is unsure of their vaccination or immunity status, is advised to check with their healthcare provider or local health department," she said.

Wehner said unvaccinated individuals who have not had the illness stand a 90 percent chance of developing the disease, if exposed. Unless immune, individuals exposed may be required to stay home from school or work for as long as 21 days.

Measles is a serious respiratory illness caused by a virus. It generally starts with a fever followed by a cough, runny nose, red eyes, and then a rash of tiny red spots. The rash starts at the head and then spreads to the rest of the body. Measles is highly contagious and is spread when an infected person coughs or sneezes. The virus can remain active in an area for up to two hours even though the infected person is no longer present. Severe complications from measles include ear infections that may lead to hearing loss, pneumonia, inflammation of the brain and sometimes, although rarely, even death.

The spread of measles can be prevented through maintaining high levels of vaccination throughout communities. DPHHS recommends that everyone stay up to date on their vaccinations.

- Children should receive their first dose of MMR (measles, mumps and rubella) between the ages of 12 and 15 months. The second dose is usually then given before entering school, around 4 to 6 years of age.
- Adults born in 1957 or later should have at least one dose of MMR vaccine. Adults born prior to 1957 are assumed to be immune due to natural infection.
- Health care personnel, college students, and international travelers need two appropriately spaced doses, unless they have evidence of immunity.
- People who have received two doses of MMR vaccine do not need a booster dose.

For more information on measles, visit dphhs.mt.gov.